

**OVERCOMING UNCERTAINTY:
U.S.-CHINA STRATEGIC
RELATIONS IN THE 21ST
CENTURY**

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INSS Occasional Paper 29

Regional Security Series

October 1999

USAF Institute for National Security Studies
USAF Academy, Colorado

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FOREWORD

We are pleased to publish this twenty-ninth volume in the *Occasional Paper* series of the US Air Force Institute for National Security Studies (INSS). As we did earlier this year with our publication of two companion papers on NATO, we now offer two complementary studies that address Chinese security developments and US-Chinese relations into the first part of the 21st Century. The first study, Russ Howard's Occasional Paper 28, *The Chinese People's Liberation Army: "Short Arms and Slow Legs,"* examines the military side of the Chinese equation, concluding that at least in the short- to mid-term, the PLA will become a stronger regional power, but will not emerge as a global military peer competitor to the United States. In this companion Occasional Paper 29, LTC (P) Neal Anderson's *Overcoming Uncertainty: U.S.-China Strategic Relations in the 21st Century*, the focus shifts to the diplomatic and economic dimensions of the Chinese equation as a foundation for long-term military relations between the US and China. Colonel Anderson presents a comprehensive review of US-Chinese bilateral relations in crafting a framework for strategic cooperation based on a clear appreciation for individual national and regional interests. Recent events, including the accidental bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade by US aircraft and the renewed tension between China and Taiwan, underscore the importance of adopting an informed and strategic approach to US-China relations. Together the two studies, written by two very bright and able United States Army officers, offer valuable insights into a rising regional power with whom the United States must interact in shaping a secure and stable East Asia.

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JAMES M. SMITH
Director

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mutual uncertainty colors every aspect of U.S.-China relations. America worries that China will use its growing military power in pursuit of expanding political and economic interests. Beijing fears that the U.S. will try to prevent it from achieving its comprehensive modernization goals. Thus, there lingers an omnipresent perception on both sides that the United States and China are on a road to inevitable confrontation that could include military hostilities. Policymakers and defense planners on each side are, therefore, required to “hedge” against some future, undefined, military threat from the other which, in turn, feeds mutual distrust. This paper offers a range of policy steps that should be taken to overcome mutual uncertainty and advance responsibly U.S.-China relations. It does so in view of changes in the global strategic environment and an assessment of China’s future. The full range of vital and important bilateral security issues are explored, including both sides’ goals, interests, and strategic perspectives regarding these issues. Finally, bilateral military relations are addressed, including why and how they should be stabilized and developed to support the overall security relationship. Ultimately, this paper is intended to provide a framework for a balanced debate on China policy that would contribute to improved stability and predictability in U.S.-China relations. Now more than ever, in the face of myriad complex foreign policy challenges and opportunities, strong bipartisan consensus is needed to formulate and implement policies that best serve America’s long-term interests. Yet, now more than ever, such a consensus appears elusive. Nevertheless, the United States has a strategic window of opportunity in which to engage China and shape Asia’s future. With open eyes and realistic expectations, this historic opportunity should not be squandered.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful to many people whose review and suggestions contributed to this paper. In particular, Dr. Paul H.B. Godwin, Admiral Eric McVaden (retired), MG Michael T. Brynes (retired), Dr. Alfred D. Wilhelm, Jr., and Mr. Kenneth Allen provided invaluable input, though their review should not necessarily be construed as support for the views expressed in this paper. Any errors, factual or otherwise, are my own.